

**LISTING OF CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in this application:

1. (Currently Amended) An instrument introducer for facilitating the insertion of a surgical instrument into a cavity or a body opening of a patient, comprising:
  - a tubular body portion defining a lumen therethrough, the tubular body portion having a proximal end and a distal end; and
  - a distal end portion secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion, the distal end portion defining a pocket and including a distal end wall configured and adapted to facilitate passage of a surgical instrument.
2. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 1, wherein the distal end portion includes an annular side wall depending from an outer terminal edge thereof.
3. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 2, wherein the distal end portion is made from an elastomeric material.
4. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 2, wherein the distal end wall of the distal end portion includes an aperture formed therein.
5. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the aperture is coaxially aligned with a central longitudinal axis of the tubular body portion.

6. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the distal end portion is secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion such that the annular side wall at least partially overlaps the distal end of the tubular body portion.

7. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 6, wherein the distal end portion is secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion such that the annular side wall completely overlaps the distal end of the tubular body portion.

8. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein a proximal terminal edge of the annular side wall of the distal end portion is secured to a distal terminal edge of the distal end of the tubular body.

9. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 7, wherein the distal end portion is secured to the distal end of the tubular body by at least one of fusing, overmolding, gluing and bonding.

10. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the tubular body portion is fabricated from polypropylene.

11. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, further including a flange extending radially outward from the proximal end of the tubular body portion.

12. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 3, wherein the distal end wall of the distal end portion is provided with a region of weakened strength.

13. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 12, wherein the region of weakened strength includes at least one of score lines, perforations, webbing and reduced thickness.

14. (Currently Amended) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the ~~distal end wall of the distal end portion is shaped to define a pocket~~ the distal end portion has a frustoconical profile including a concave annular side wall.

15. (Currently Amended) An instrument introducer for facilitating the insertion of a surgical instrument into a cavity or a body of a patient, comprising:

a hollow elongate cylindrical body including a distal end portion terminating in a distal edge and a proximal end portion, the cylindrical body defining a central longitudinal axis; and

an elastomeric cap secured to the distal end portion of the cylindrical body, the cap defining a pocket and including a distal end wall having an outer terminal edge and an annular side wall depending from the outer terminal edge thereof, the distal end wall including an aperture formed therein in the pocket, wherein a center of the aperture is coaxially aligned with the central longitudinal axis.

16. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the cylindrical body is configured and adapted to receive a surgical instrument therethrough.

17. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, further including a flange extending radially outward from a proximal terminal edge of the proximal end portion of the cylindrical body.

18. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the cap is secured to the distal end of the cylindrical body such that the distal end wall of the cap is spaced a distance from the distal terminal edge of the cylindrical body.

19. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the cap is secured to the distal end of the cylindrical body such that a proximal terminal edge of the annular side wall is secured to the distal terminal edge of the cylindrical body.

20. (Currently Amended) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein ~~the distal end wall of the cap is shaped to define a pocket and wherein the aperture is formed in the pocket~~ the distal end portion has a frustoconical profile including a concave annular side wall.

21. (Currently Amended) A method of introducing a surgical instrument into a cavity or a body opening of a patient, comprising the steps of:

providing an instrument introducer, wherein the instrument introducer includes a hollow tubular body having a distal end portion and a proximal end portion defining a lumen therebetween, and a resilient cap secured to the distal end of the tubular body, the cap defining a pocket and including a distal end wall having an aperture formed therein;

inserting the distal end of the instrument introducer into the cavity or body opening of the patient;

inserting a surgical instrument into the lumen of the tubular body of the instrument introducer through a proximal end of the tubular body; and

advancing the surgical instrument through the lumen of the tubular body of the instrument introducer until a distal end of the surgical instrument projects out through the aperture of the cap, wherein the cap creates a seal around the perimeter of the surgical instrument extending therefrom.

22. (Currently Amended) A method of introducing a surgical instrument into a cavity or a body opening of a patient, comprising the steps of:

providing an instrument introducer, wherein the instrument introducer includes a hollow tubular body having a distal end portion and a proximal end portion defining a lumen therebetween, and a resilient cap secured to the distal end of the tubular body, the cap defining a pocket and including a distal end wall having an aperture formed therein;

inserting a distal end of a surgical instrument into a proximal end of the tubular body of the instrument introducer;

inserting the distal end of the surgical instrument, having the instrument introducer placed thereon, into the cavity or body opening of the patient;

advancing the surgical instrument through the instrument introducer until the distal end of the surgical instrument projects out through the aperture of the cap, wherein the cap creates a seal around the perimeter of the surgical instrument extending therefrom.

23. (Currently Amended) An instrument introducer for facilitating the insertion of a surgical instrument into a cavity or a body opening of a patient, comprising:

a tubular body portion defining a lumen therethrough, the tubular body portion having a proximal end and a distal end;

a distal end portion secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion, the distal end portion defining a pocket including a distal end wall configured and adapted to facilitate passage of a surgical instrument therethrough, the distal end portion further including an annular side wall depending from an outer terminal edge thereof;

wherein the distal end wall of the distal end portion includes an aperture formed therein, and further wherein the aperture has a smaller diameter than a diameter of the end wall, and wherein the aperture is provided with a region of weakened strength.